

DECREE RESPONDING TO THE SPREAD OF COVID-19

Protocol No.: **013-2020**

Re: **Sunday Obligation**

Witnessing with deep concern the rapid worldwide spread of COVID-19, a disease caused by a strain of coronavirus,

Bearing in mind the vital importance of preventing or at least slowing the spread of the disease, especially in defense of the elderly and other vulnerable populations for whom it can be particularly dangerous or lethal,

Considering that the avoidance of gatherings of people is among the most effective measures for preventing the spread of the disease, especially at the crucial early stage when some degree of containment is still possible,

Seeing that the Holy Mass typically involves a large gathering of people, of whom vulnerable populations represent a sizable portion,

At the same time noting that the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is, if possible, even more necessary during these difficult times,

Having consulted with medical professionals, with pastors and other priests, with diocesan and parish staff, and with other lay members of the Christian faithful,

Now, by the present decree, I, the undersigned Bishop of Madison, make the following provisions, effective immediately and until further notice:

- While the priests of the Diocese of Madison are to continue celebrating the Holy Mass, all of the faithful of the diocese are dispensed from the obligation to attend Holy Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligation.
- While no one is bound to make use of this dispensation or prohibited from attending Mass, I urge all the faithful to weigh carefully the decision whether to attend Mass, taking into account not only the risk to themselves but also the risk of spreading the disease to others, especially the most vulnerable, particularly in light of the fact that unknowing carriers of the virus may be asymptomatic.
- Those who do decide to attend Mass are reminded that, while no one other than the celebrating priest is obligated to receive Holy Communion at all, those who are properly disposed and choose to receive should exercise caution to do so in a manner, whether in

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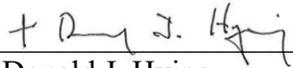
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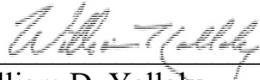
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the hand or on the tongue, that avoids any physical contact with the minister of Communion.

- Without laying any particular obligation on anyone, I urge all the faithful who make use of this dispensation to unite themselves spiritually to the Sacrifice of the Mass and to sanctify Sundays and other holy days of obligation through prayer and pious works such as reading Scripture, praying the rosary, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, or watching the Mass on television.
- Pastors and other parish leaders are encouraged to consider cancelling or postponing religious education classes and other parish events.
- Pastors, while they should continue to celebrate daily and Sunday Masses, may decide to reduce the number of Masses if warranted, being careful to communicate such decisions to the faithful clearly and with sufficient advance notice.
- Conversely, pastors may choose to add additional Masses so as to ensure that a smaller number of the faithful attend each Mass, provided that the norms regarding bination and trination are observed, again being careful to communicate schedule changes clearly with the faithful of the parish.
- Priests are urged to celebrate a “Mass for Various Occasions,” particularly #45 “For the Sick” or #48 “In Any Need,” on the days permitted according to liturgical norms.
- Priests are urged to continue to hear confessions, even more frequently if possible, while taking suitable hygienic precautions.
- Priests are urged to hold Eucharistic processions and promote other devotions for the sake of petitioning for healing and fostering repentance, always taking care to avoid attracting large numbers of the faithful.
- Priests are to be especially attentive to the needs of the sick during these times, and they should exercise courageous generosity in providing them with the Sacraments and pastoral care while still avoiding undue or disproportionate risk.
- All the faithful of the Diocese of Madison and all people of good will are asked to pray fervently and to attend lovingly to the needs of those around them, especially the most vulnerable.

Given at Madison this 12th day of March, in the year of our Lord 2020.


+Donald J. Hying
Bishop of Madison


William D. Yallaly
Chancellor